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ABSTRACT

A comparative survey of 46 Alaska school superintendents and 520 in the nation at large reveals that nearly all the superintendents in both groups consider their relationship with the school board to be important and spend a considerable amount of time on that relationship. A positive correlation emerges between the importance superintendents attribute to their relationship with the board and the time they spend on it. Two statistical techniques--canonical correlation and multiple/correlation analysis--reveal correlations in both groups (Alaska and nationwide) between the importance superintendents give to their school board relations, time spent on those relations, and assorted task variables. Data are provided for both positive and negative correlations. Positively correlated task variables include freedom to employ and dismiss staff, attitude of community toward education, sense of achievement, and recognition by others, while no correlation emerged for time spent on curriculum, finance, regulations, or staff relations, or for personal/experiential variables. In view of the obvious importance of board-superintendent relations, helpful hints are provided for enhancing this relationship: (1) a well-developed contract, (2) clarification of duties and mutual objectives, (3) cooperative agenda building, (4) open communication, and (5) professional development. (TE)

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SUPERINTENDENT-BOARD RELATIONSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES AND ALASKA

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SUPERINTENDENT-BOARD RELATIONSHIP IN THE

UNITED STATES AND ALASKA

The relationship between the school board-members (policy makers) and their school superintendents (chief executive officers) has a bearing on the organizational success, implementation of board's policies, and employment of the superintendents. Experience as well as research tends to indicate that a better superintendent-board relationship leads to a better implementation of board's policies, organizational success, and renewal of the superintendent's employment contract.

A poor relationship between superintendent-board can have detrimental effects on the task accomplishment and personal success. Again generally speaking, where people have low working relationship there is more likely to exist low levels of productivity and organizational success. In school districts poor superintendent-board relationship tends to lead to high turnover of superintendents and job stress for both the superintendents and the board-members.

It is almost trite to point out that the superintendent-board of education relationship is the single most important relationship in the school district. Its effectiveness will permeate each and every aspect of the operation of the school

district. In addition, many aspects of this relationship will affect the school district's relationship with the community.[1]

Data-analysis of the national study reveals that nationwide most of the school superintendents (90.5%) considers their relationship with the board-members is very important to them, 98% of the superintendents said it is medium to very important, only 2% of the superintendents said the relationship with the board-members is of little importance to them.[2] See Table 1.

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP WITH BOARD-MEMBERS (NATIONWIDE)

Importance		Frequency	Percent
Little	1	6	1.6
	2	4	0.8
	3	39	7.5
	4	151	29.0
Very	5	320	61.5
	Total	520	100.0

[1] Frank C. Mayer and Harold E. Wilson The Effective Superintendent: Techniques and Practices (Midland, Michigan: Pendell Publishing Company, 1972), p 20.

[2] Krishan Chand, "Job Satisfaction of Superintendents in the United States" (Ed.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1982).

These data are derived from the data collected for the said dissertation. This reference also applies to tables 2,5, and 6.

About seventy percent (70.2%) of the superintendents in the nation reported they spend a great deal of time on their relationship with the board-members, 93.7% of the superintendents said they spend medium to a great deal of time, only 6.3% of the superintendents said they spend only a little time on their relationship with the board-members.[1] See Table 2.

TABLE 2

TIME SPENT ON RELATIONSHIP WITH BOARD-MEMBERS (NATIONWIDE)

Time spent		Frequency	Percent
Little	1	8	1.5
	2	25	4.8
	3	122	23.5
	4	201	38.7
Great Deal	5	164	31.5
Total		520	100.0

There is a positive relationship between the importance the superintendents' give to the relationship with the board-members and the time they spend on the same. Coefficient of correlation between the given importance and the time spent on the relationship with the board-members is .5.

Data derived from a study of the Alaskan school superintendents reveals the similar findings about the significance of the superintendents-board relationships.

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[1] Ibid.

Most of the superintendents (95.7%) in the state, considers their relationship with the board-members is very important to them, all the 100% of the superintendents said it is medium to very important, none said it to be of a little importance.[1] See Table 3.

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP WITH BOARD-MEMBERS (IN ALASKA)

Importance		Frequency	Percent
Little	1	0	0.0
	2	0	0.0
	3	2	4.3
	4	3	6.5
Very	5	41	89.2
	Total	46	100.0

About seventy four percent (73.9%) of the superintendents in the state of Alaska reported they spend a great deal of their time on their relationship with the board-members, 93.4% of the superintendents said they spend medium to a great deal of time, only 6.6% of the superintendents said they spend only a little time on their relationship with the board-members.[2] See Table 4.

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[1]Krishan Chand, Job Satisfaction of Alaska School Superintendents and its Comparison with the Nationwide American Superintendency ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 226 483, 1983.

These data are derived from the data collected for the said study. This reference also applies to tables 4,7, and 8.

[2]Ibid.

TABLE 4

TIME SPENT ON RELATIONSHIP WITH BOARD-MEMBERS (IN ALASKA)

Time spent		Frequency	Percent
Little	1	3	6.6
	2	0	0.0
	3	9	19.5
	4	15	32.6
Great Deal	5	19	41.3
	Total	46	100.0

There is a positive relationship between the importance the superintendents in Alaska give to their relationship with the board-members and the time they spend on the same. Coefficient of correlation between their given importance and the time spent on the relationship with the board-members is .5, which is the same as in the case of the nationwide superintendents.

EFFECT OF TASK VARIABLES

Two statistical techniques, canonical correlation and multiple/correlation analysis revealed that, nationwide there is a positive relationship between the importance the superintendents give to their relationship with their board-members and nine task variables: (1) importance superintendents give to their freedom to employ staff, (2) importance they give to their freedom to dismiss staff, (3) the feelings the superintendents have concerning their status in the community, (4) the attitude of the community towards education, (5) sense

of achievement of the superintendents in their profession, (6) recognition of their work by others, (7) opportunity for their personal growth, (8) methods used to evaluate their performance, and (9) the prospect of a renewal of their employment contract. Coefficient of correlations between importance they give to the relationship with their board-members and the stated task variables are given in table 5.

TABLE 5

COEFFICIENT OF CORRELATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP WITH BOARD-MEMBERS AND TASK VARIABLES (NATIONWIDE)

Dependent Variable= Relationship with Board-Members	r
Freedom to employ staff	.5
Freedom to dismiss staff	.4
Status in the community	.4
Attitude of community towards education	.3
Sense of achievement in their profession	.3
Recognition of their work by others	.3
Opportunity for personal growth	.3
Methods used to evaluate their performance	.3
Renewal of their employment contract	.3

n = 520

The other task variables do not have any effect on the importance the superintendents give to their relationship with their board-members. It does not matter if he has negative or positive feelings about the attitude of parents towards

education, number of hours put in at his work per week, amount of paper work with which he deals, and his safety on job.

It does not matter how much importance he places on or how much time he spends on: (1) curriculum, (2) finance, (3) state regulations, (4) federal regulations, (5) collective negotiations, (6) relationship with assistants, (7) relationship with principals, (8) relationship with teachers, (9) relationship with community, (10) relationship with non-certified staff, and (11) relationship with state department of education. It does not matter whether he would or would not choose the superintendency again, as to the importance he gives to his relationship with the board-members.

There is also a positive relationship nationwide between the time spent by the superintendents on their relationship with their board-members and three task variables: (1) importance superintendents give to employ staff, (2) time they spend to employ staff, (3) time they spend to dismiss staff. Coefficient of correlations between the time they spend on their relationship with the board-members and the stated task variables are given in table 6.

TABLE 6

COEFFICIENT OF CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TIME-SPENT ON BOARD-RELATIONS AND TASK VARIABLES (NATIONWIDE)

Dependent Variable= Time Spent on Relationship with Board-Members	r
Freedom to employ staff	.4
Time spent to employ staff	.4
Time spent to dismiss staff	.4

n = 520

The other task variables given in table 5 and also those variables listed following the table 5, but not listed in table 6 do not have any effect on the time the superintendents spend on their relationship with the board-members.

Data derived from the study of the Alaskan school superintendents revealed that there is a positive relationship between the importance the superintendents give to their board relations and seven task variables: (1) attitude of the community towards education, (2) attitude of parents towards education, (3) number of hours put in at work per week, (4) methods used to evaluate their performance, (5) importance they give to their freedom to dismiss staff, (6) sense of achievement of the superintendents in their profession, and (7) recognition of their work by others. Coefficient of correlations between the importance they give to the relationship with their board-members and the stated task variables are given in table 7.

TABLE 7

COEFFICIENT OF CORRELATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP WITH BOARD-MEMBERS AND TASK VARIABLES (IN ALASKA)

Dependent Variable = Relationship with Board-Members	r
Attitude of community towards education	.4
Attitude of parents towards education	.4
Number of hours put in at work per week	.4
Methods used to evaluate their performance	.4
Freedom to dismiss staff	.4
Sense of achievement in their profession	.3
Recognition of their work by others	.3

n = 46

The other task variables given on pages 5-7 of this paper but not listed in table 7, do not have any effect on importance the superintendents give to their relationship with their board-members in Alaska.

There is also a positive relationship between the time spent by the superintendents in Alaska on their relationship with board-members and eight task variables: (1) recognition of work by others, (2) sense of achievement in their profession, (3) number of hours put in at work per week, (4) methods used to evaluate their performance, (5) renewal of their employment contract, (6) time they spend on their freedom to dismiss staff, (7) importance they give to their freedom to dismiss staff, and (8) time they spend to dismiss staff. Coefficient of correlations between the time they spend on their relationship with the board-members in Alaska and the stated task variables are given in table 8.

TABLE 8

COEFFICIENT OF CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TIME-SPENT ON BOARD RELATIONS AND TASK VARIABLES (IN ALASKA)

Dependent Variable= Time spent on Relationship with Board-Members	r
Recognition of their work by others	.6
Sense of achievement in their profession	.5
Number of hours put in at work per week	.5
Methods used to evaluate their performance	.5
Renewal of their employment contract	.5
Time they spend to employ staff	.5
Freedom to dismiss staff	.5
Time they spend to dismiss staff	.5

n = 46

The other task variables given on pages 5-7 of this paper but not listed in table 8 do not have any effect on the time the superintendents spend on their relationship with the board-members in Alaska.

EFFECT OF PERSONAL-EXPERIENTIAL VARIABLES

None of the personal-experiential variables appears to have any effect on how much importance the superintendents give or how much time they spend on their relationship with the board-members nationwide and also in the state of Alaska.

It does not matter whether he is employed by an elementary, junior high, senior high school, or a K-12 school district; it does not matter if he is working for a small, medium or large school district; it does not matter if he is working for an urban, suburban, or rural school district; it does not matter if he is working for a fiscally dependent or independent district; it does not matter how many people are employed in the district. Nor does it matter if a superintendent has a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or a higher degree. It does not matter what is his major field of study. It does not matter what is his area of certification nor does it matter what has been his experience as an educator/non educator.

The superintendent's age, race, marital status, sex, whether or not his spouse works, or if he takes an active part in extra curricular activities involving youth do not have any noticiable influence on how much importance the superintendents give or how much time they spend on their relationship with the board-members.

HELPFUL HINTS TO ENHANCE THE RELATIONSHIP

Inspite of the importance and great deal of time the superintendents spend on their relationship with the board, tensions exist between many superintendents and their boards. "Caliber of persons assigned to or removed from local boards of education" and "administrator-board relations" are ranked second and third among the top 10 issues that would drive superintendents out of their positions, should those issues intensify.[1]

Patience, understanding, trust, respect, honesty, and an open communication are considered to be helpful for an effective relationship between superintendents and the boards. Both the boards and the superintendents should consistently strive to maintain and enhance a good working relationship. Some of the helpful hints to enhance the relationship are:

Contract

A well developed employment contract is important. It serves as a basis for both the superintendents and the school board to ... building a clear and rational relationship between the board and superintendent.[2]

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[1]Luvern L. Cunningham and Joseph T. Hentges The American School Superintendency: A Summary Report (Arlington, Va: American Association of School Administrators, 1982), p.42.

[2]Paul B. Salmon and Thomas A. Shannon, Forward to The Superintendent's Contract - A Joint Publication of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association (Arlington, Va: The American Association of School Administrators, 1979), p.1.

Duties

To minimize confusion of jurisdiction between board-superintendent, spell out in as much as detail as possible the exclusive duties of each party. Procedural rules and policy statements will serve as guides to help the board and the superintendents each to emphasize most the role that can best benefit the school and community.[1]

Objectives

Whenever any difference occur, it is better to concentrate on a common objective. It should usually be one that helps to provide the quality educational program for the pupils. After all the schools are for pupils. At the same time find out more about the problem and a proper solution for the same.

Agenda

Building the agenda has its own effect on the superintendent-board relations. Building the agenda for the next school board meeting is one of the most important jobs of the superintendent. Incidentally, studies show that the input from superintendents plays the major role in determining what, when, where, and who appear on the agenda.[2] In advance of meetings, the superintendent and the board chairman may find it helpful to the smooth running of the meeting if they preview the agenda and discuss issues that may arise.[3]

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[1]Van Miller, George R. Madden, and James B. Kincheloe The Public Administration of American School Systems (N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, 1972), p.59.

[2]Willard Fox, "Agenda Building" The School Administrator (September 1983): 10.

[3]American Association of School Administrators School Board-Superintendent Relationships (Washington: American Association of School Administrators, 1956), pp 103-104.

Communication

Keep your board members informed. It is unfair to expect boards of education to perform their task well without adequate information.[1] Formal and informal communication channels exist in all organizations. Effective communication procedures and techniques must be developed for these channels. The formal communication channels carry both instrumental and expressive content. The informal network, however, can particularly enhance the formal with expressive substance.[2]

Professional Development

Today's board of education is faced with new tasks, new responsibilities and operations. As a result, the boards of education must utilize every resource to update and upgrade practices and procedures employed in its operation. Individual board members or, preferably the board of education as a whole, should take advantage of each opportunity to attend regional, state and national meetings of school boards associations and other groups involved in school governance.[3] The board of education should also utilize the resources available through various publications available to them. The superintendents should also participate in activities related to their professional development.

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[1]William Ellena, "Tenure and the Superintendent" The School Administrator (May 1981): 2.

[2]Wayne K. Hoy and Cecil G. Miskel Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice (N.Y.: Random House, 1978), p.246.

[3]Mayer, The Effective Superintendent: Techniques and Practices, pp. 17-18.

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